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AUTHOR Haas, Toni
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ABSTRACT

This paper differentiates between the "old story" of rural education and the emerging "new story." It describes the tradition (old story) in which rural education is related to the local and national economies and lays out fragments of the new story, a paradigm that combines rural education and the rural economy in a way that strengthens them both. The old story reflects society's continuing shift from agriculture to industry and from industry to information. It suggests that rural schools have two purposes, to educate students either as participants in communities that are perpetually dependent on natural resources, or to take their places in urban industrial America. The result has been urbanization and rural decline. The new story says rural education is responsive to changing economics, demographics, and societal expectations. It holds promise for improving opportunities for rural children and communities. The characteristics of rural education are decentralization, diversity, unpredictability, evolving outcomes, high value for flexible generalists, and small scale. The mission of rural education is to meet community needs. Schools should provide choices for students who choose to stay in rural America, as well as for those who leave. Local boards regain central importance. Bureaucracy is limited. Curriculum is redesigned for authentic, relevant learning. Course delivery more closely predicts learning situations students experience throughout their lives. Teachers are generalists trained to help students find and use information. Schedules fit the task. Schools change from isolated hierarchical bureaucracies to networks of flexible, interdependent agencies acting in symbiosis with their communities. In conclusion, several examples of the "new story" in action are described and a list of 44 references is also provided. (TES)

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KEEPING SCHOOL IN RURAL AMERICA: A NEW PARADIGM FOR RURAL EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

by

Toni Haas

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KEEPING SCHOOL IN RURAL AMERICA: A NEW PARADIGM FOR RURAL EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

> It's all a question of story.. . . . The Old Story --the account of how the world came to be and how we fit into it--sustained us for a long period of time. It shaped our emotional attitudes, provided us with life purpose, energized action. It consecrated suffering, integrated knowledge, guided education. We awoke in the morning and knew where we were. We could answer the questions of our children. . . . it provided a context in which life could function in a meaningful manner. The Old Story is not functioning properly, and we have not learned the New Story (Berry, 1978).

Our beliefs about The Story, about what is true and what is real, undergo fundamental shifts from time to time. And when our perception of the nature of things shifts, the complex system of human life also shifts. We are in the middle of the most significant shift in the way we understand the world since the Enlightenment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The indications of such a shift are found in changes in the shared pattern of ideas over a broad range of human inquiry, thought and interest (Schwartz & Olgivy, 1979). The emerging New Story is important, for it influences our beliefs about justice, about how the world works, and about how children should be educated. This paper describes how the Old Story came to be, and lays out fragments of the New Story, a paradigm that combines rural education and the rural economy in a way that strengthens them both.

THE OLD STORY ABOUT RURAL EDUCATION AND THE RURAL ECONOMY

The Old Story for rural America was that our schools had two purposes: to educate students to be productive, participating citizens in communities dependent on natural resources (agriculture, mining, forestry, hunting and fishing), or, if they choose, to take their places in urban, industrial America. Over time, natural resource jobs diminished as industrialization and mechanization took a toll, and leaving seemed to be the only economically sound alternative.

Public education reflected this change by adopting a mass production factory model of schooling, schooling which was designed to prepare students to leave rural communities and find their way into the industrial workforce. Urbanization was the touchstone of public policy. While public schools served the purposes of urbanization and industrialization well, it was at the expense of rural communities. From an economic perspective, public schools came to represent one of the largest, if not THE largest, economic drains on local communities. The local community's financial and human resources (the students) were fed into the system. The school was considered to be a success when those students left to work or continue their education, most of whom would never return.

The decline of rural America within this public policy environment was inevitable. And, while for a short time during the 70's there was a brief reversal of the rural to urban migration, the deterioration of the rural economy brought movement to the urban centers, and that rate is increasing alarmingly. At the beginning of this decade, the total rural to urban outmigration was quite modest, only about 30,000 people left rural America for jobs and lives in urban centers from 1980-1984. In the past several years the exodus has reached record heights, nearly 500,000 annually (Deavers, 1989).

America must reverse this emptying out of the countryside, for a vital rural sector is essential to a strong national economy. The levers to reverse that trend can be found in forecasts and predictions of the economy of the 21st Century. The emerging economy will be diverse, we are told, and the largest rate of growth will come in small businesses. It will be based on information and service, not industry and manufacturing. The economy will be decentralized, not centralized; diversity will replace standardization and generalists replace specialists. Because raw materials will play less of a role, jobs can be located where people find the highest quality of life, they need not be limited by physical transportation or the assembly of large numbers of people.

This societal shift provides a window of opportunity for stabilizing, if not turning around, the rural decline. However, if America is to have a vital rural sector in the 21st Century, a new way of thinking about how to educate students in rural America is essential. This paper presents a new paradigm for education in rural America, a paradigm responsive to changing economics, demographics and societal expectations about the purposes and outcomes of public education, a paradigm which holds promise for improving the educational opportunities for rural children AND supporting rural development.

HOW THE OLD STORY CAME TO BE

IN THE EARLIEST YEARS WE WERE ALL RURAL

America of the early years was America of manifest destiny and the unlimited frontier. In 1790, 95 percent of Americans lived in rural settings and only five percent of the people lived west of the Appalachian Mountains. Filling up the wilderness was an important public policy and the availability of low cost farm land on the frontier, earlier marriages, rising birth rates and an open door immigration policy led to an astounding rate of population increase, exceeding 25 percent every ten years until the mid-1880's (Johnson & Beegle, 1982; Stokes, et. al., 1979). Education, primarily a responsibility of the family, was governed by representatives of families that bonded together and sponsored schools and educational activities they collectively deemed proper. Settlement patterns dictated

that these families tended to be socially and economically homogeneous and shared common values (Rosenfeld & Sher, 1977).

SOCIETY SHIFTED FROM AGRICULTURE TO INDUSTRY

Within a hundred years it became clear that the frontier was not unlimited. Growth in manufacturing drew many young people to the cities in search of economic advantages (Lee, 1964). By 1880, urban dwellers were a majority in the Northeast, by 1920 a majority in the north-central and West and by 1960, most of the residents of the South lived in urban areas (Johnson & Beegle, 1982). The economic base of the society had shifted from agriculture to industry and, a hundred years later in 1988, close to 90 percent of American's rural population neither lives nor works on farms (Hobbs, 1988).

The shift from a family model to an factory model of schooling happened even faster than the shift to an industrial society, in part because much educational policy was made in the rapidly urbanizing Northeast (Tyack, 1974; 1982). Centralization, specialization, professionalization and standardization were the mechanisms by which the schools were to be controlled as the organization of schools reflected the new social relationships of industry (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). The most visible outward sign of the factory model was in consolidation as more than 200,000 local schools were merged into town schools and then into larger, multi-community school districts. The 128,000 schools in 1930 have, in the last half century, shrunk to 15,500 districts, districts that faithfully reflect the factory model's value that bigger is better and that schools exist to create an elite managerial and large industrial work force. (Augenblick & Nachtigal, 1985; Nachtigal & Haas, 1988).

THE SHIFT CONTINUES FROM INDUSTRY TO INFORMATION

Alas, the kinds of workers that schools are creating are not the workers employers now want. Global economic restructuring is swiftly changing the basis of America's economy from industry to information. No longer able to compete in world markets for jobs requiring low level skills, the capacity of America to provide a high standard of living for all our people is increasingly in doubt (Carnegie, 1986). The rural sector has been particularly hard hit in the 1980s, with substantial declines in agriculture, energy, natural resource development, and durable goods manufacturing (Deavers, 1989). In state after state, across nearly every indicator of economic performance, rural areas lag behind urban areas. Rural areas appear to be suffering some serious resource deficiencies, especially with regard to human resource capacity (Horowitz & Dunn, 1989).

Technology is upgrading the conceptual work required in most jobs, job growth is predicted mainly in high-skill occupations in the service sector that need solid reading and writing skills and finally, the way work is now being organized will require a completely new set of skills (Bernstein, 1988), skills that most American schools are currently not organized to create or provide.

THE NEW STORY ABOUT RURAL EDUCATION AND THE RURAL ECONOMY

Begin with the assumption that the public education system is the primary societal investment in young people. Then public schools are both youth (individual) and society (the collective) serving. They must, therefore, encompass multiple purposes, simultaneously achieved.

Public education can be improved by managing that investment to achieve certain goals: individual empowerment, economic health; social justice, cultural renewal. This new paradigm for education requires, fundamentally, a different, closer relationship between students, teachers, parents, administrators, and community members. The new relationship is based on more personal interactions and requires small scale groupings of people. Rural schools, because of their size, scale and traditions, are best positioned to create models for this new education paradigm, this New Story.

The Old Story worked for much of the larger society when America believed that "bigger was better" and focused on industrialization, organization and expansion. It worked at the expense of rural America. Society generally viewed rural America from a deficit model, as second best. The canons of industrialization and the accompanying specialization and large size that provided economies of scale became the principles guiding how good education was to be organized, staffed, managed and evaluated. Rural areas and rural schools could not, by definition, fare well under this story: they were dispersed, isolated, responsive to unique community characteristics and traditions, staffed by generalists, and, above all, small. Reforms that incorporated assumptions of the Old Story simply did not, could not, apply (Haas, 1989). Preparing students for the 21st century requires what Sue Berryman calls "fundamental reform in what all individuals need to learn and how they need to learn it" (1989, p.22.).

THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW STORY

The characteristics of the New Story are decentralization, diversity, unpredictability, evolving outcomes, high value for flexible generalists and small scale (Schwartz & Olgivy, 1976; Naisbett, 1984; Naisbett and Aubergene, 1990; Peters & Waterman, 1984; Toffler, 1970; Wurman, 1989). The presumption in the New Story is that intelligence and expertise are built out of interaction with the environment, not in isolation from it (Berryman, 1989) and that education for youth is the basis for lifelong learning. Thus, the New Story for rural education

requires a re-examination of the goals and processes of education, beginning with the mission of the school.

IN THE NEW STORY, THE MISSION OF RURAL EDUCATION IS TO MEET COMMUNITY NEEDS

Schools have an educational mission, whether it is clearly articulated or implied. In the Old Story, that mission has been fairly narrowly defined, e.g. providing a good basic education for those individuals between the ages of approximately five to 18. In rural schools, educational programs were designed for emancipation, that is to equip students with the skills and knowledge to continue their education and or move from the local community areas in which there were labor markets. Because of state regulations, which have been defined by the industrial, urban "one-best-system" model, and because of the limited numbers and resources of the small school, the curricula that results in rural communities tends to be heavily college prep, leaving non-college bound students less well served.

In the New Story, education systems that serve rural students and their communities will have multiple purposes. The first is to prepare students to be productive workers in a rapidly changing and highly interdependent economic system. However, education in the future will not be about emptying out rural America by encouraging migration to urban areas. The schools will have a central role to play in creating options for students who chose to remain in rural America, by teaching them how to analyze markets and how to create jobs.

As America moves from an economy based on industry to one based on information, it is information that gets transported, not raw materials. Where one lives is not dependent on the way one makes a living and employment opportunities of the future are less place bound. Given a technological infrastructure to transport information, decisions about where to live can be made on quality of life criteria. The mission is refocused to include the empowering of students, giving them the skills, knowledge, attitudes to make choices about staying in the community as well as leaving.

Rural education in the New Story will need to address the diverse populations found in rural communities. For instance, poverty rates for nonmetro working families are much higher than poverty rates for metro working families. In fact, a family in which the household head works is about twice as likely to be poor in nonmetro as in metro locations and this is true for whites and blacks, and for both full and part-time workers (Shapiro, 1989, p.xi). Depending on the availability of other social service agencies, the school, often the last viable institution in rural communities, may expand it's mission to become the general store of public services, including health, economic development, welfare and other social services.

The mission of the school under the New Story, then, is to serve students of all ages, including pre-schoolers and adults, as well as the traditional student population and meet a variety of needs. A stable rural renaissance becomes possible and schools have an important role to play in creating this future, as globally, societies are becoming more dependent on balanced distribution of population and a healthy, diverse rural sector.

IN THE NEW STORY, GOVERNANCE IS DECENTRALIZED AND TAKES PLACE CLOSEST TO THE PEOPLE AFFECTED

Because of the centralization of control which has accompanied the urbanized one-best-system, the importance of local boards as a policy making body has decreased. With fewer and fewer real decisions to be made, boards have tended to drift to special interest policy making and/or become more involved in the administration of schools. Because schools need to be tightly linked with and responsive to the unique conditions of each community, in the New Story, local boards resume central importance. Local control will once again be a cornerstone of the rural school. In fact, the governance structure will need to be expanded as the school broadens its mission, providing representation of all interests and segments of the community.

IN THE NEW STORY, BUREAUCRACY IS LIMITED.

The industrilization of the work force created increased demands for administrative positions. Full-time superintendents and principals are expected to staff even the smallest school systems. The size of the administrative staff can be predicted by the degree to which states legislate control over local school programs. In the New Story, the focus shifts away from bureaucratic roles to outcomes. While the need for strong accountability and related reporting procedures are necessary to fulfill the public trust, as public education moves toward the development of a sophisticated set of outcome measures to be met by all schools, the plethora of rules and regulations concerning "in-puts" and "through-puts" can be reduced. States will concentrate on the quality of the school's product, not the process used to achieve that level of quality. With the reduction of compliance guidelines for operation, the central office administrative functions will be reduced and could be contracted to a regional or multi-district agency, thus eliminating the need for an administrative bureaucracy in each rural district.

IN THE NEW STORY, CURRICULUM IS REDESIGNED TO PROVIDE AUTHENTIC, RELEVANT LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND CREATE KNOWLEDGE AND MEANING

The current curriculum in rural schools is standardized across the country and across the countryside. Courses are more and more specialized and fragmented, instruction is driven by the text book and increasingly irrelevant to local

community needs. Under the Old Story, curriculum (or what gets taught) is driven by homogenized, "dumbed down" textbooks and tests that are standardized and nationally marketed. Subjects are artificially divided, fragmented and abstract. Students learn more and more about distant issues over which they have less and less control (Hobbs, 1988). Mastery of content is demonstrated by memorization and reproducing the single "correct" answer on infrequent examinations.

The New Story presents a more integrated, dynamic and holistic image of learning as active and interactive. Reading, for instance, is now defined as the interaction of the reader, the text and the context, as the process of construction meaning from written texts (English Coalition Conference, 1989). Thinking becomes part of the core curriculum and content taught as whole ideas, rather than isolated bits of information or rote definitions (Fenniman & Tinzmann, 1990).

Mathematics is also perceived as a living subject in the New Story, a vital human endeavor that makes sense of size, shape and order. Problem solving is its core, and reasoning is fundamental to its use. Mathematics is a language to help students think systematically about space, quantity and order (NCTM, 1989; Fenniman & Tinzmann, 1990).

Nor is science about vocabulary and memorization, the way the Old Story has it. In the New Story, science is an on-going social enterprise motivated by a fundamental and universal desire to make sense of the world. The four overarching goals of the American Academy for the Advancement of Science Project 2061 include student understanding of the scientific endeavor, developing scientific views of the world, forming perspectives on science and establishing scientific habits of mind (AAAS, 1989, Fenniman & Tinzmann, 1990).

Finally, all these converging approaches are made relevant and authentic to rural students as the curriculum of the restructured school begins with the community as a focus of study. Local examples and environments are used to assist student to see the inter-relationships among various content areas, e.g., mathematics and the social sciences, science and the arts, and so forth, with an emphasis on learning to learn.

IN THE NEW STORY, COURSE DELIVERY MORE CLOSELY PREDICTS LEARNING SITUATIONS STUDENTS WILL EXPERIENCE THROUGHOUT THEIR LIVES.

Typical instruction in existing schools consists of a teacher with about 30 students, graded by age, in a classroom for 55 minute periods. Instructional materials tend to be limited to the text-book, work sheets or paper and pencil activities. Instruction is dominated by the teacher talking and the students listening.

As early as 1977, Coleman outlined how most learning is being delivered in a model he called the "information assimilation model. This model begins with the presentation of information. The learner then receives information through symbolic media. The learner organizes information into principles and generalizations and infers a particular application from the general principle. An application in action is next, followed by the revision of principles used.

This approach is clearly the most common in current American public education. It assumes students are passive learners and not responsible for learning. It is not connected to authentic, life experiences of students, bores them in the present and does nothing to prepare them for learning as adults. Sue Berryman and Lauren Resnick summarize the differences.

- There is a contrast between individual cognition in school versus shared cognition outside. For the most part, school is designed so that one student's success or failure at a task is independent of what other students do. Outside of school, a great deal of activity takes place in social systems where what one person is able to do depends fundamentally on what others do. "Successful functioning" depends on the mesh of several individuals' mental and physical performance.

- There is a contrast between 'pure' mentation in school versus tool manipulation. In school, individuals are required to operate in testing situations without tools (books, notes, calculators or other complex instruments). Out of school most mental activities are intimately involved with and shaped by the physical and intellectual tools available. Criteria for competence include the expert use of tools.

- There is a contrast between symbol manipulation in school versus reasoning about things and situations that make sense to people outside school. School learning is mostly symbol-based and a matter of learning rules, then saying or writing things according to the rules. Outside of school, actions are intimately connected with things and events. Mental activities make sense in terms of their immediate effects, and their actions are grounded in the logic of immediate situations.

- Finally, there is a contrast between generalized learning in school and situation-specific competencies outside. In school we aim for general, widely-useable skills and theoretical principles. Yet outside, to be truly skillful, people must develop situation-specific forms of competence. Studies of expert radiologists, electronic troubleshooters, and lawyers all reveal a surprising lack of transfer of theoretical principles, processes or skills learned in school to professional practice. Schooled people do better, although they rarely use the supposedly general algorithms that they have been taught in school and instead invent new solutions specifically appropriate to the situation at hand (Resnick, 1988; Berryman, 1989).

The New Story approach is rooted in the developmental theories of John Dewey, Jean Piaget and others, who stress learning as an interaction with the environment. They argue that development (learning) occurs as individuals strive to develop more satisfying and complex ways to understand and act upon their world (Conrad & Hedin, 1989). The steps in an experiential approach include: action in a particular situation; seeing the effects of that action; understanding these effects in a particular instance; understanding the general principle under which it falls; and application of that principle in new circumstances (Coleman, 1977).

In the New Story, then, educational experiences are provided in a wide variety of ways with a heavy emphasis on experiential learning. Experiential learning is more receptive to higher-order thinking, in that students interact with problems that have solutions not specified in advance, with multiple solutions and multiple, sometimes conflicting criteria. Experiential learning places information in a context, with real-life complications, nuances, uncertainties and connections. It is difficult, effortful, and motivates the learner through connections to personal, immediate concerns.

Because learning is experiential and takes place in the real world, and because the curriculum is more integrated, groupings of students will be also be more real, e.g. multi-age and multi-interest groupings. The use of general grouping patterns will allow for more efficient staffing patterns not possible with the specialized one-best-system.

Technology is an integrated component of the educational delivery system. Master teachers are shared among clusters of neighboring schools via fiber-optic or microwave interactive video, and/or audio graphic systems. Specialized courses that can be offered no other way will be brought in by satellites. Computers serve as learning tools for simulations and handling the data of real world learning experiences.

In the New Story's use of the community as the focus of study, students learn about the importance of history by becoming historians of their own community. Economics and social science come alive as students collect and analyze data about the local social and economic conditions. Much of science, energy, food production, the ecology and biology are taught in the laboratory that exists in the school's surrounding environment.

IN THE NEW STORY, INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF ASSUME DIFFERENT ROLES

In the Old Story, teachers were specialized and expected to be the source of all knowledge. They served as the givers of information to students who passively received it. The system was not set up to make good use of "experts" who are not properly certificated. In the New Story, teachers are generalists, educated in ways

to help students find and understand how to use information. They are facilitators of learning rather than repositories of content. This does not mean that they need not know content. Being substantially grounded in a field is necessary to guide students in the study of that content.

IN THE NEW STORY, SCHEDULES FIT THE TASK.

The school schedule in the Old Story was rigid and clearly defined by Carnegie units filling a six or seven class-period day, meeting five (in some cases four) days a week for approximately 180 days. All learning was expected to take place during those school hours, and as part of teacher-required and specified homework. In the New Story, courses are taught in longer blocks of time, for most courses a minimum of two hours, making more efficient use of instructional time and allowing students to move beyond the school walls for learning. Students are encouraged to undertake long term projects that integrate various disciplines and learnings, and to persevere until they are satisfactorily completed. Schedules are flexible to allow for extended learning time around field activities or projects.

With electronic networking and the use of computers for instruction, daily attendance at school may no longer be necessary. With a shift from "time-based" to "outcomes" based measures of student achievement, meeting the schedule and being physically present in school becomes less important.

IN THE NEW STORY, THE DEFINITION OF STUDENT IS EXPANDED

In the Old Story, students were those between the ages of six and 18, enrolled in school. You were either a student or you were not. In the New Story, the lines between who is a student and who is not are blurred. Teachers and students learn together as they puzzle through complex problems with multiple solutions. Schools may offer day-care where some formal learning takes place. High school students may elect to be part-time students combining learning with work. Earning a high school diploma can take either more or less time than 12 years. Adults are served by a wide variety of job related, life enrichment, or leisure time activities. Adults are integrated into many instructional options currently reserved only for traditional high school students.

IN THE NEW STORY, SCHOOL ORGANIZATION CHANGES FROM ISOLATED, *HIERARCHICAL BUREAUCRACIES TO FLEXIBLE, INTERDEPENDENT AGENCIES WITH MULTIPLE LINKS

In a specialized industrial model of education, school districts operate as autonomous/full-service organizations. With the exception of special education, each district is expected to offer all the functions and learning opportunities needed by the local community. In an information service society, the New Story encourages minimal organizations that meet immediate needs. School districts,

while preserving their identity and control through local boards, form consortia with other districts, institutions of high education, and private sector agencies to provide the various functions of schooling which cannot effectively and efficiently be provided by a single district. For instance, advanced placement programs will be offered by community colleges rather than duplicated by local districts; contract arrangements for vocational education will replace expensive vocational facilities.

The relationship of schools and communities will become more symbiotic. Each faculty member represents a source of talent and knowledge which can, and often does, extend far beyond the classroom. Students represent an untapped source of energy, curiosity and a strong desire to contribute in tangible, meaningful ways. Classes and services provided for students such as business planning, career counseling, skill assessment and vocational training can benefit adults in the community as well.

Schools are a significant physical presence and a major public infrastructure investment. In many rural communities they are the only public space. School buildings, facilities and equipment may be made more affordable through cooperative purchases and maintenance, as well as cooperative use. The purchasing and payroll power of the school is considerable and efforts can be increased to invest it locally. Finally, an often overlooked resource is the financial capacity schools have to draw outside dollars into the local economy from private, state and federal sources (Sher, 1987; Haas, et. al., 1988).

THE NEW STORY IN ACTION: EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD

The above speculation about how the new story for rural education might unfold is a single and incomplete vision, fragments which have not yet come together into a mosaic. Because of the diversity of rural America, there will not be a single story but multiple stories. Educators interested in rural America's future are already at work creating those stories. A few examples:

- In Custer, South Dakota, for instance, the students conducted the community survey necessary for the Chamber of commerce's Farm Home Administration (FmHA) loan application for low cost housing.

- In Buffalo, South Dakota, students did a market survey and collected letters of intent to accompany the Small Business Administration (SBA) loan application for a local entrepreneur who is going to open a health club.

- In Belle Fourche, South Dakota, students surveyed the town on behalf of the local garbage collector to determine whether he should make an investment in large dumpsters or continue to provide individual garbage cans. When the city council awarded a contract for the garbage service to an out of towner on the basis of a low bid, the students researched

the costs to the community of having that contract not managed locally and discovered the city was actually losing money because resident's former salaries would no longer circulate in town. They presented their results to the Council and recommended that future contracts be awarded to low bidders only after an economic impact statement had been prepared and analyzed.

By using the community as the focus of study students can make significant contributions to community well being at the same time they provide real learning experiences. Below are some action projects that increase the investment young people feel they have in the health and well being of their communities.

- o Health classes arrange for first aid and CPR instruction of community members, including other students, increasing the community's capacity to respond to health emergencies.
- o Science classes organize and coordinate a recycling center and recycling drives.
- o Agriculture or biology classes plant trees and provide other landscaping for community beautification projects.
- o Health, physical education, sociology, marketing or home economics classes work with the community to develop a community wellness plan.
- o Shop classes build exercise or fitness equipment and biology or earth science classes design and construct a fitness walk.
- o The biology or earth sciences classes research, plan and create a nature trail. Members of those classes provide guided trail walks. Journalism classes develop and produce self-directed trail guides.
- o Students organize sports leagues and invite community participation.
- o Speech or theater students provide oral storytelling and puppet show sessions on Saturday mornings for small children, perhaps at the community library.

Focussing study on the community not only makes the curriculum more relevant but provides a better understanding of the community and develops a sense of personal commitment through experiencing how the individual can make a difference. Activities might include:

- o Students conducting voter registration drives, first among their peers and then in the community.
- o Students in social problems classes organizing "Meet the Candidates" nights and debates for contested seats in local elections.

Expanding the classroom into the community provides the opportunity to revitalize rural education, meeting state objectives (the most practical guidelines are in Sometimes a Shining Moment, Wigginton, 1983) helping rural students continue to do well on standardized tests and go to colleges of their choice. It also leads students to observe and appreciate their own environments. Community study facilitates two basic outcomes. It uses cooperative learning and invokes higher-order thinking skills as students learn about their community's economy and culture. The student becomes an empowered citizen, contributing to a more promising future for rural America

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